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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EATD](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: UNRWA'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ATTEMPTS TO USE ANNUAL MEETING TO PROMOTE GOVERNANCE REFORM

REF: A. AMMAN 5918

[1](#)B. GENEVA 1643

CLASSIFIED BY A/POL CHIEF ERIC CARLSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Breaking with recent practice, UNRWA's Advisory Commission (AdComm) met in Amman on September 30 in advance of the informal fall meeting of UNRWA major donors and host governments (MDM). Incoming AdComm Chair, Jordan, chose the unusual timing to further its campaign to invigorate the UNGA-mandated body under its watch (Ref A). However, UNRWA ComGen Hansen's inability to attend the AdComm, due to Israel's closure of the Erez crossing and ongoing military action in Northern Gaza, forced Jordan to postpone a key "brainstorming session" on the need to change AdComm's membership and function. Responding to members' calls for pragmatism, UNRWA ComGen did permit Deputy ComGen Karen Abuzayd to step in and complete the traditional process of receiving AdComm members' comments on the ComGen's draft report to the UNGA covering work UNRWA had undertaken during the period July 2003-June 2004, as well as the AdComm's formal letter commenting on UNRWA's work over that same period. As has been the case in prior years, debate focused on the extent to which the AdComm should criticize Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza in its letter. All members, however, expressed strong appreciation for the chance to review UNRWA's operations at the high-level conference held in Geneva June 7-8 (Ref B), and called on UNRWA to continue to develop tripartite consultation mechanisms as a prime means to counter its chronic under funding. Abuzayd responded to specific USDEL calls for consultations with donors on the emergency appeal and mid-term plan that UNRWA has been drafting by assuring delegations that UNRWA would consult donors on its Emergency Appeal in Jerusalem on October 7 and would also include a specific session on the MTP on this fall's MDM agenda. END SUMMARY.

JORDAN CONTINUES TO PUSH ADCOMM AS VEHICLE FOR UNRWA REFORM  
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[1](#)2. (C) UNRWA's UNGA-mandated Advisory Commission (Belgium, Egypt, France, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, U.K., U.S. and the PLO, as observer) held its annual meeting in Amman September 30. The U.S. delegation was led by Consulate General Jerusalem A/PO Connelly and included Regional RefCoord Kaneshiro. In a break from recent practice, this year's AdComm was held in advance of the fall meeting of UNRWA major donors and host governments (MDM). The unusual timing was the brainchild of incoming AdComm Chair Jordan, which has been encouraging stakeholders working to establish UNRWA governance structures with real oversight over UNRWA programs and budgets to look at the AdComm as an appropriate vehicle for reform, particularly given strong PLO and Syrian opposition to the creation of any new UNRWA governance structures (Ref A). According to UNRWA External Affairs Director Andrew Whitely, GOJ Department of Palestinian Affairs Director General Abulhaija had also tried (but failed) to secure the participation of Jordanian FM Muasher to further draw attention to this year's session.

[1](#)3. (C) Apart from working to raise the AdComm's profile, Jordan had secured UNRWA's agreement to include on this year's meeting agenda a discussion session on the future of the AdComm, including the need for possible changes in AdComm membership and function. However, this session was indefinitely postponed on the eve of the AdComm, at ComGen Hansen's request, after UNRWA determined that Hansen would be unable to travel to Amman due to Israel's closure of the Erez Crossing and its ongoing military action in Northern Gaza. COMMENT: There was no opposition to the postponement of the brainstorming session. Several AdComm members, including Japan and the UK, expressed unease on the margins of the AdComm about turning the AdComm into a venue for governance reform discussions at a time when UNRWA and key stakeholders are on the verge of launching a new field-based working group

on stakeholder relations that will be charged with developing recommendations designed to invigorate governance structures in advance of the 2005 spring MDM (septel). DG Abulhaija's de facto deputy, DPA advisor Mona Darwaza, revealed to Refcoord in advance of the AdComm that Jordan had hoped to use the brainstorming session to secure backing to table a new UNGA resolution calling for an expansion of the AdComm's membership at this year's General Assembly meeting. END COMMENT.

#### MEMBERS CALL FOR ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTS

14. (C) While ComGen Hansen insisted on being present at any AdComm discussion on governance reform, he agreed to allow the AdComm to carry on with its traditional operations, empowering Deputy ComGen Karen Abuzayd to receive members' comments on the Commissioner's draft report to the UNGA on UNRWA operations covering the period July 2003-June 2004, as well as the traditional letter the AdComm delivers to the ComGen commenting on UNRWA operations over the same period. As in previous years, the AdComm letter (Para 6) had been drafted largely in advance by UNRWA's External Relations Department and debate on its wording focused on how strongly the letter should criticize Israeli actions in Gaza and the West Bank. However AdComm members, in their own statements, expressed notably uniform support for the opportunity to discuss UNRWAs operations in its five fields that took place at the June 7-8 Geneva Conference. Jordan, Syria, and the PLO called on UNRWA to continue to seek ways to develop tripartite consultations on UNRWA programs as a means to counter the Agency's chronic under funding and declining donor response to its emergency appeals at a time when the needs created by continued increases in unemployment, malnutrition and poverty among Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza were escalating, according to the ComGen's draft report.

#### UNRWA RESPONDS TO USG REQUEST FOR BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

15. (SBU) Deputy ComGen Abuzayd responded to specific calls made by the USG del for consultations on the Emergency Appeal and Medium Term Plan (MTP) that the Agency is currently drafting (see below) by assuring delegates that UNRWA planned to consult with donors on its next appeal for emergency funding to support additional programs in the West Bank and Gaza in Jerusalem October 7, and that it had added a session on the MTP to the agenda of the October 13-14 MDM.

#### ADCOMM LETTER, CHAIR'S PRESS RELEASE AND USG STATEMENT

##### 16. (U) ADCOMM LETTER

##### BEGIN TEXT OF LETTER:

Letter dated 30 September 2004 from the Chairperson of the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East addressed to the Commissioner-General of the Agency

At its regular session, on 30 September 2004, the Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) considered your draft annual report on the Agency's activities and operations during the period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004, which is to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

The Commission noted with concern the continuing deterioration in the political, economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the escalation of armed attacks during the reporting period. The humanitarian crisis is evidenced primarily by high levels of poverty, deteriorating health conditions, the displacement of an increasing number of Palestinians following the destruction of their homes and the disruption of educational programmes and the increasing exhaustion of the capacity of the Palestinian population to sustain itself in the face of the continuous decline in economic and social conditions since September 2000. For instance, you report that a total of 970 refugee shelters were demolished, rendering over 9,416 Palestinians homeless, during the period under review. In addition, recent reports estimate unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territory at the end of 2003 at approximately 25 per cent, even excluding unpaid family labour and a marked increase in "self-employment." Those conditions have had a particularly severe effect on Palestine refugees, who are often among the poorest and most vulnerable part of the population, and have required additional engagement by the Agency.

The Commission noted with concern that the construction of the separation wall/fence, internal and external closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has led to severe and sustained mobility restrictions on the Palestinian population and has had repercussions on their daily life and future. The restrictions have led to the loss of access by the population to employment and income as well as access to essential goods and services. The restrictions have also had a serious impact on the ability of the Agency to move staff and humanitarian assistance to those in urgent need. Obstacles to the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to refugees have remained in place as the conflict and level of violence has persisted. The Commission noted the negative impact of those practices on UNRWA operations and reiterated the need to take urgent measures to remove restrictions placed on the movements of Agency staff and goods, in keeping with international law and the agreements between UNRWA and the Government of Israel. We noted therefore, with particular concern, that you were denied the opportunity to attend this meeting in person, as a result of Israel's closure of the Erez crossing and its refusal to facilitate the free movement of international humanitarian workers. The Commission also expressed concern at the declaration by the United Nations of security phase IV on 20 July 2004, as a result of Israeli military operations in the Northern Gaza Strip, during which the lives of no less than 54 UNRWA staff members were put at serious risk, with shots fired in their direction or immediate vicinity. This forced the Agency to relocate most of its Headquarters International staff, thereby severely disrupting the operations at Headquarters. The Commission noted that all regular programme and emergency operations in the Gaza Strip continued, as these are implemented by the Agency's Gaza Field office, which remained fully staffed.

The Commission commended the Agency's management and staff under your leadership for the resolute and effective response to the continuing emergency in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Commission noted with appreciation the dedication with which many of the Agency's staff members have worked for long hours in the field and, in the case of area staff, without receiving the hazard pay they deserve, as is received by staff of other UN Agencies, to overcome obstacles often in dangerous and even life-threatening situations, and to deliver services to those in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The Commission reaffirmed the pressing need to respect the integrity of the United Nations and the immunities of its staff, particularly in the case of humanitarian staff courageously operating in areas of conflict, as stated in Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) of 26 August 2003.

The Commission commended the efforts of the Agency to respond to the continuing emergency in the occupied Palestinian territory and to mobilize contributions by the international community for its emergency appeals. It noted that, up to the end of 2003, donors had contributed \$323.1 million in response to appeals amounting to \$529.7 million. It also noted that the Agency had launched appeals totalling \$209.4 million including \$15.8 million for the Rafah appeal, for the year of 2004. The Commission noted with concern that the level of response of the international community to the 2004 appeals has stagnated, in that as of mid-September 2004 only \$89.5 million had been pledged and \$82.9 million actually received. In the light of the escalation of the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, the Commission appealed to the international community to do its utmost to enhance contributions to the Agency's emergency programmes. It also called upon UNRWA to continue to examine closely its emergency programmes and priorities, and its analysis of its emergency needs, and to explore further options to widen the donor base and increase donations, to fulfill the Agency's and the refugees' needs.

The Commission also expressed its concern at the destruction of and damage to the infrastructures and facilities of UNRWA. It noted the increase in military incursions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the ensuing high number of refugee shelters destroyed in the latter area during the reporting period.

The Commission recognized that the Agency has made efforts to conduct an effective programme of delivery of emergency assistance to the affected refugees, and that the Agency's periodic reports have been distributed to donors to inform them of the implementation. It expressed its appreciation at the improvements in coordination of emergency activities on the ground, including through the Operational Coordination Group, and the Agency's close relationship with the International Committee of the Red Cross and with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. The Commission expressed its satisfaction at the significantly increased level of cooperation and coordination within the UN system, resulting in the production of the Consolidated Appeal for the occupied

Palestinian territory for 2004 (CAP). It encouraged UNRWA to continue to work closely with OCHA in this field.

The Commission underscored the crucial importance of the Agency's regular budget and the need for a consistent and growing level of contributions to it. It noted that, for the year 2003, contributions amounting to \$323.4 million had been received. The Commission stressed the importance of a steady and predictable growth in contributions to the regular budget in the coming years, which is indispensable if the Agency is to respond adequately to the refugees' real needs in the five fields of operations. The Commission also called upon UNRWA to expand and report on its efforts to reach out to non-traditional donors to ensure that the Agency's financial needs are met.

The Commission expressed great appreciation to the host Governments for the continuing support and services they provide to Palestine refugees, recognizing the important contribution made by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the services it provides to the Palestine refugees.

The Commission expressed its gratitude to those donors who have made additional contributions to the Agency with a view to absorbing the outstanding VAT debt due from the Palestinian Authority. It urged the Agency to continue to pursue the objective of VAT exemption for UNRWA as well as the reimbursement of outstanding VAT with the Palestinian Authority. It also requested the Agency to continue discussions with the Israeli authorities with a view to recovering all outstanding port charges, in accordance with the 1967 Comay-Michelmores agreement between Israel and UNRWA.

The Commission recognized the structural under-staffing of the Agency at its Headquarters and field offices and expressed support for UNRWA's request for additional international positions from the United Nations "assessed contribution" budget. It welcomed the Agency's decision to abolish the area staff rules of 1999 thereby contributing to the Agency's efforts to attract and retain qualified area staff. It noted that a sum of \$5.1 million was still outstanding with respect to the expenses incurred by the Agency on account of the shifting of its headquarters from Vienna to Gaza, in accordance with the instructions of United Nations Headquarters. The Commission requested you to pursue the matter with the United Nations Headquarters for the reimbursement of the amount as soon as possible.

The Commission commended UNRWA and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for organizing the Geneva Conference on 7-8 June 2004. The conference's preparatory process was particularly successful in closely involving member States and other stakeholders and providing for constructive interaction between them. The Conference itself saw an impressive level of participation and genuine interest in supporting the Agency's mandate and operations in the field. The Commission emphasized the importance of the follow-up process which is already underway and will form the basis of further discussion with the Agency regarding its priorities and programmes, and their articulation within the Agency's proposed Medium Term Plan, as well as the way forward as regards the Agency's consultative mechanisms, including this Advisory Commission itself.

The Commission recognized the vital role the Agency plays in providing the refugees with essential services and in contributing to regional stability, and underlined the need to further upgrade the Agency services. It expressed its support for the various major rehousing and infrastructure projects undertaken in, inter alia, the Jenin, Neirab, Tel el Sultan, Khan Danoun, Khan Eshie and Khan Younis camps, as well as the ongoing Palestine refugee records project. It also underlined the need for donor countries to continue to enhance their contributions to the UNRWA budget at the current critical stage so that UNRWA can continue to fulfill its mandate until a just settlement to the refugee issue has been implemented, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Commission expressed its warm appreciation for your personal commitment to the service of the refugees and the effective leadership you are providing the Agency at a particularly difficult period in its history.

(signed) Abdul Karim Abu el-Haija  
Chairperson of the Advisory Commission  
END TEXT OF LETTER.

17. (U) ADCOMM CHAIR'S PRESS RELEASE

BEGIN TEXT OF PRESS RELEASE:

Press Release Issued by the Chairman of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, Mr. Abdul Karim Abu el-Haija, on 30 September 2004

Amman: The Advisory Commission of the United Nations Relief

and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) this morning held a meeting in Amman in which it reviewed the draft report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA covering UNRWA's work and activities in its five fields of operation during the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004.

In this regular session, which is chaired by Jordan, the Commission unanimously stressed the importance of the role played by UNRWA in alleviating the suffering of the refugees, especially in the West Bank and Gaza Strip resulting from the closures and other measures imposed by the Israeli authorities in those areas.

The Commission also stressed the importance of reinforcing the existing cooperation between UNRWA and the Advisory Commission in order to allow for a bigger role by the Commission in putting future plans concerning UNRWA's work and programmes.

At the end of today's deliberations, the Chairman of the Commission addressed a letter to the Commissioner General of UNRWA containing the Commission's most prominent observations on UNRWA's work during the reporting period. In this context, the Commission expressed its deep concern over the continuing deterioration in the political, economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the escalation of armed attacks during the reporting period. These measures led to high levels of poverty, unemployment, deteriorating health and education conditions and the displacement of an increasing number of Palestinians following the destruction of their homes by the Israeli army.

The Commission noted with concern that the construction of the separation wall, internal and external closures and curfews imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Palestinian population have led to the loss of access by the population to employment and income and have had a serious impact on the ability of the Agency to move staff and humanitarian assistance to those in urgent needs.

The Commission also expressed its concern that the Commissioner General of the Agency Mr. Peter Hansen was unable to attend today's meeting as a result of the Israeli military operations in north Gaza, which prevented the Commissioner General from leaving Gaza for Amman.

In addition to Jordan, the Commission includes Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, USA, UK, Japan, France, Belgium and Turkey. The PLO attends the Commissions' meeting as an observer.

END TEXT OF ADCOMM'S CHAIR'S PRESS RELEASE.

18. (U) STATEMENT BY US DELEGATION

BEGIN STATEMENT:

Commissioner General Hansen, Mr. Chairperson, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor for me to represent the United States at this meeting and to acknowledge the important work of this organization.

Please allow me to express my delegation's gratitude to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for hosting this meeting and for its long-standing, generous support to the Palestinian refugees.

I would also like to express my government's gratitude to the Government of Jordan for taking on an active leadership role as Chair of the Advisory Commission. As we have noted in previous meetings, the Advisory Commission can and should play an important role in reviewing the agency's programs and priorities. During this meeting, and over the coming months, we look forward to discussions on possible reforms to the Advisory Commission, which we believe could strengthen its role and increase donor confidence in UNRWA.

We welcome the Commissioner General's report on the Agency's activities over the last year. We have reviewed the document carefully and would like to offer some comments on areas of particular concern to the United States.

As noted in the report, the tragic events of the last year have again required UNRWA personnel ) particularly those in the West Bank and Gaza ) to perform extraordinary work under very difficult circumstances. We commend UNRWA staff for their selfless dedication, often at great risk, to provide emergency health services, food assistance and other forms of relief to a population caught in the midst of a terrible cycle of violence. We regret that security conditions in Gaza necessitated the evacuation of most of the Headquarters staff, and hope that the security situation will improve so that they can return.



As the emergency in the West Bank and Gaza extends into its fourth year, the United States calls upon the international community to respond generously to UNRWA's emergency appeal. We remain troubled that the appeal is only about one-half funded. The United States has responded to the 2004 appeal with a contribution of \$40 million, which is about 40% of total contributions to date. We call on other donors to contribute generously to the appeal. There are many examples cited in the Commissioner General's report of the negative consequences to the refugees due to under funding of the emergency appeal.

We have engaged with UNRWA over the last six months in a dialogue about emergency appeal programs, priorities, and budgets, with a view to both addressing true emergency needs while obtaining better donor response. We recommended that an independent review of emergency needs could strengthen donor confidence in the extent of needs and UNRWA's proposed response. We urged UNRWA to improve its strategic planning and analysis of emergency needs. We noted that food should be UNRWA's highest priority among its emergency activities. We recommended that UNRWA incorporate those elements of the emergency appeals that are ongoing activities into UNRWA's regular or project budgets. And finally, we urged UNRWA to work closer with donors in developing future emergency appeals. To that end, we urge other donors to join us in discussions with UNRWA now, as the Agency begins formulating the 2005 appeal.

The United States remains deeply concerned by UNRWA's financial situation. The Commissioner General's report notes that donor pledges to the 2004 regular budget amounted to \$301 million during the reporting period, leaving a shortfall of almost \$29 million. We echo the Commissioner General's call on donors to meet the needs of regular budgets, which is critical to providing a minimum level of assistance to Palestinian refugees during a time of high population growth, inflation, the needs arising from the effects of the conflict, and in anticipation of possible needs in Gaza following an Israeli withdrawal. We salute UNRWA for working, since the June conference in Geneva, to expand its donor base.

We commend UNRWA's effort to address longer-term needs through a five-year, medium term plan. We look forward to learning about UNRWA's plans in more detail, especially concerning timing, priorities, budgeting, and overlap with other ongoing programs and projects. We urge that UNRWA allow time for donors to consult, debate, and make known their concerns before the medium term plan is finalized and released. But the need for additional schools, health clinics, other infrastructure, and housing is clear from the Commissioner General's annual reports and from our own visits to camps throughout the five fields. We are especially concerned about declining education and healthcare data, and need to reverse these losses.

The current violence and strife in the region require UNRWA staff to exercise the utmost vigilance in protecting the integrity of the agency, its mission, and its installations against any form of abuse. As we have noted previously, it is imperative that agency personnel continue to uphold the high standards of conduct expected of United Nations staff members. For the United States, this includes ensuring that beneficiaries of UNRWA assistance programs have not engaged in acts of terrorism. We commend UNRWA's efforts to further refine its procedures for protecting the integrity of UNRWA operations, and appreciate the seriousness with which UNRWA staff view their obligations as international civil servants. We are pleased to note that on several instances in the past year, when Palestinian militants entered UNRWA premises, the Agency took immediate steps to effect their removal from the installations and protested to the Palestinian Authority, which responded promptly and effectively. It is critical that UNRWA continue to take every measure possible to ensure that combatants do not exploit its facilities.

In closing, I would like to reiterate President Bush's commitment to work with the Quartet and with the parties themselves to reach a just, comprehensive, and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to achieve his vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. UNRWA is a force for stability in the region and is helping to lay the groundwork for an eventual peace. The United States reiterates its strong support for UNRWA and its mandate, and thanks the Commissioner General for his nine years of tireless service to the Agency.

Thank you.

END US DEL STATEMENT.

19. (U) A/PO Connelly cleared this message.

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